

admiration in falling asleep by pretentiousarah

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Summary:

A year and a half after graduating high school, the party has fallen apart, but a Thanksgiving visit prompts Will to come out and draws Mike and Will back together in some very unexpected ways.

admiration in falling asleep

Author's Note:

so some notes! el goes by jane because i got tired of flipping between calling her both names so she goes by jane bc she can use that name to start over and become her own person or whatever, will had an obvious crush on mike growing up but mostly got over it after high school bc he deserves to not pine forever, mike is confused about everything and nancy is his best friend, and the title is ripped straight from sufjan stevens magnum opus 'the predatory wasp of the palisades is out to get us'

i expect this fic to be about three or four chapters, as it is all outlined and mostly written but we'll see where the editing and posting process takes us

enjoy!

Will Byers didn't really intend to formally come out to the party, it was sort of an accident, but he hadn't expected his whole life to change, either. He figured that much like his mother and Jonathan, his childhood friends already knew that he was gay.

Of course, Jane already knew. She had spent the last four years living with Joyce and Jim in the old Byers household, where the couple decided to stay after starting to date. They still hadn't gotten married (Joyce insists that she's too old for that sort of hassle, she'll save that for when Jonathan decides to settle down), but Will and Jane have had a bet going for half a decade about when Hopper pops the question. Will was sure that he'd wait until Jane moved out, at least, but the more he thought about it, the more it he hoped he was wrong. His mom deserved to be happy, and if the gruff police chief made her happy, then she deserved him.

Jim and Jane's increased presence around the house started about a year after the events of 1984, though, and considering Will had gotten his first boyfriend the summer after his senior year in 1988,

when he had first up and moved to California on a whim, his adopted family learned about his male tendencies alongside his mother and brother, but if he were being honest, Will knew that Joyce and Jonathan had already known. They just understood him, and he couldn't believe how lucky he was to have such a loving and accepting family.

That being said, the changes that followed his offhanded comment in late 1989 were..... surprising, to say the least.

Will was nineteen years old and visiting Hawkins for Thanksgiving when he told his childhood friends that he was gay. The party had slowly been drifting apart since they all went in very different directions following their high school graduation. Dustin had moved to Indianapolis to study biology and education ("Can you imagine the sort of power I'll have as the next Mr. Clarke?" he had said when applying to colleges), Max moved back to California to live with her dad while she figured out her next move (that next move was waitressing, thus far, but Will was sure that she would do something incredible with time), Lucas moved to Chicago to pursue science and mathematics (if he doesn't end up at NASA, then no one will), and Mike followed in his sister's footsteps, moving to New York City, where he attended NYU. He was still undecided in his major, but Will always hoped he would end up writing stories. After all, they had spent all of high school convinced that Mike would write stories and Will would draw them, making them the world's greatest comic book duo of the 20th century.

That turned out to be a pipe dream, though, when graduation prompted Will to move suddenly and without explanation to San Francisco where he bussed tables and freelanced illustrations. Will didn't mean to leave them all behind, but it was hard not to when all he wanted was to be free of Hawkins and all the pain it had ever caused him. Unfortunately, the party was all a part of that.

Of course, he didn't leave them behind entirely, he could never be so cruel and selfish. Will still visited his mom and Jane and Jim, and when he did, he met with as many of the party members as he could. They were, after all, the closest friends he would ever have. You can't

survive the end of the world with someone without keeping them in your heart forever, at least a little bit.

So when Thanksgiving of 1989 came around, a full year and a half after the end of high school and the beginning of the end, the entire party was finally all in the same place at the same time. Mike called all of the members individually and practically forced them to say they would spend an afternoon in his basement with pizza and shitty sci-fi movies just like old times. Will smiled wistfully when it was his turn to field Mike's phone call, as if he would ever decline the opportunity to see five of his favorite people on the planet all in the same place. It was so like his old best friend to dramatize even a holiday get-together, and it made Will all the more glad to be visiting.

When the day came to visit the party, Will was greeted at the door by a beaming Mike Wheeler who immediately wrapped him up in a tight hug, arms instantly wrapped around Will's torso.

"You're acting like I didn't just see you over the summer," Will laughed, but returned the hug with just as much, if not more fervor.

"Yeah, but this time it's different, it's like we're in high school again!" Mike said, releasing Will and leading him into the house, "Lucas and Max are already here, Dustin said he would be here in ten minutes twenty minutes ago so I'll give it another ten before he's here, and Jane is on her way, but I'm sure you already knew that," Mike explained as the boys made their way down to the basement, grinning at each other.

"I swear you spoiled her with all of that 'pretty' stuff, ever since she and Nancy started talking, it takes her longer and longer to get ready," Will rolled his eyes.

"Don't say shit like that, you sound like a douche," Max stood up and smirked at him, holding her arms open as she walked towards him.

"Sorry, sorry, you're right," he smiled at Lucas over her shoulder as he hugged her.

"Well don't tell her that, it'll just encourage her," Lucas joked,

earning him an elbow in his side.

The ribbing continued, and in fact got even more intense, when the remaining members showed up, showered in hugs and kisses and teases and silly nostalgic memories. For just one night, it was like old times. The year and a half between the group melted away and left them all laughing and lying in one another's laps as they caught each other up on their lives, hopeful about staying in better touch this time.

The atmosphere changed, just a little, though, when it came to the mention of romance for some people. Max and Lucas had ended amicably in their senior year, after Max decided to move to California, but everyone could see Lucas was still a little in love with her, and probably always would be. That wasn't really the source of the tension, though, nor was the series of looks shared between Jane and Mike that hinted at something a little softer than friendship, but everyone knew that couldn't be helped, not really, not after the history between them. They may have broken up shortly after her return during the whole Mindflayer debacle, but they had gotten together again halfway through their sophomore year, when Jane had gotten a little more up to speed about the world and more prepared for a real-life romance. Things had ended again the spring of their senior year, but they would always have a little something between them.

That, though, still wasn't the cause of the tension in the room. Will was surprised when it was something he said caused the first hiccup of the night. If they were betting on it, he would have put ten dollars on someone making an ill-timed joke about Steve the Babysitter in front of Dustin, but alas, it was his own nonchalance that caused a momentary lapse in conversation.

"What about Will?" Max had demanded, sloughing off accusations about 'running off to the big C-A' from Lucas, "He didn't even tell me he was moving to San Francisco! I didn't even know we were in the same state for the first four months!"

"If it makes you guys feel any better, I barely even told Jonathan until I was already living in the apartment with Luke," Will said, a small smile on his face. He knew that the party wasn't really mad;

they understood why he did it.

“Really?” Mike said, “I think I called Nancy every five seconds during the move to NYC. She was so tired of me living in the same city as her within the first ten minutes, I think she was ready to drop out of Columbia just to avoid me.”

“Luke?” Lucas cut in, laughing, “Do I have competition as the favorite Lucas in your life?”

“Well, seeing as we’re sleeping together, I think my boyfriend has slight priority, but I’ll give it to you this time,” Will said without thinking.

He had no real intentions of telling them all about Luke, save for Jane, who of course already knew, but after living in the very gay-friendly community of San Francisco, he was so used to being honest about his ‘roommate’ that it had just slipped out. The following moments were very awkward, and the silence led to Will lifting his head from where his eyes were focused on pulling a slice of cheese pizza from the spot it had melted onto his plate. He immediately made eye contact with Mike, whose brown eyes were wide and and his mouth dropped open in shock. Will stuttered, backtracking, “I mean, uhh, roommate, not boyfriend? I just, I misspoke is all-”

“Will,” Jane interrupted, Will’s eyes snapping over to her. Her kind face and soft smile provided instant relief to him, relaxing his suddenly quick beating heart. “It’s okay.”

Will looked over at the rest of the room, hoping for similar responses from the other party members. He was thankfully not disappointed, absolutely relieved when Max snorted and said “Roommate? Please, Will, I’ve known you long enough that you having a boyfriend is the single least surprising thing you could have said. You’re gonna have to try harder to scare me off.”

Will smiled and laughed, “Yeah, I guess I figured you guys already knew. I wasn’t exactly subtle when we were younger.”

Lucas and Dustin’s ice melted next, they shared a knowing look with each other and then laughed.

"I'm just surprised you, uh, that you said it," Mike said after a moment, voice stilted and a little awkward, "I mean, yeah, we all figured, but, yeah. You just... came out."

"I guess I did."

The rest of the night went on as planned, after the minor drama Will accidentally caused. Dustin and Jane threw popcorn at one another, trying to catch it in their mouths, Max and Lucas pretended that they weren't flirting (spoiler: they were), and Will was happy just to take it all in and let his heart feel fuller than it had in over a year.

Mike, though.... Mike was a little... off.

He still smiled and joked with the rest of the group, but his smile didn't quite reach his eyes every time, and sometimes during a lull in the action, when no one was tickling anyone or jumping over legs to get to the last of the Coca Cola, he looked a little faraway, like he wasn't quite there in the moment. Will wasn't sure, but he was willing to bet it had something to do with his confession earlier in the night.

Eventually, the yawns began. It started around midnight, and Max insisted on staying despite her tiredness, deciding that she would rather act like her sixteen year old self, passing out across Lucas' lap halfway through Ghostbusters, than go back to stay the night in the Hargrove household. Will didn't even mind when she began to lightly snore, interrupting Bill Murray's nonsensical ranting, since the movie was still a sore spot for him after that Halloween fiasco- and everything that followed it. He was more than happy to follow in the redheaded girl's footsteps and lean back against the soft brown couch and start to doze off to the sound of Venkman and Stantz bickering on the fuzzy television screen, burrowing himself into the ugly green afghan that had inhabited the couch since they were ten.

One moment he was tenderly dreaming, something soothing and sweet that he couldn't recall if his life depended on it, and the next thing he knew, he was being shaken awake.

A blurry Jane was leaning next to him, saying goodnight and pressing a kiss against his forehead. He remembered mumbling out something akin to a 'goodnight' and was nearly back asleep when another hand found his shoulder, shaking him back into true consciousness.

This time, he was greeted to Mike Wheeler's face only inches from his own. He jerked back into the sofa, startled, but once he wiped the sleep from his eyes he smiled softly.

"What's up?" he whispered, the room still dark and the rest of the party still obviously asleep, strewn in across the room in various configurations.

Mike nodded towards the direction of the stairs, a silent question for a more private conversation. Will stood up and followed Mike upstairs, a silent thought that even after all these years, he would follow Mike anywhere.

Mike knew that Will was gay.

It was a fact that everyone had sort of just known. Some people, like Lonnie and Troy, used that fact to bully Will and single him out, but others, like Joyce and Jonathan, had loved him unconditionally, and encouraged Will to be his whole and authentic self, even if the rest of the world wasn't ready for his love yet.

Mike had spent so many years thinking that he was part of the second group of people, never commenting on Will's delicate nature, only ever showing him affection and support, that when Will actually had done the improbable and told the party about his boyfriend, Mike felt, well, conflicted.

There was the part of him that felt so much pride when Will said 'boyfriend,' the part of him that loved Will so very much, but that made it all the more confusing when he clammed up, shellshocked at Will's confession. Of all the ways Mike thought he would react to the news, he had never guessed that the feeling of his heart sinking in his chest would be one he went with.

He spent the entire night out of his own mind, thinking about Will and this Luke guy. Why couldn't Mike wrap his head around it? He's had plenty of time to come to terms with Will's sexuality, and he had honestly thought that he had. In fact, he spent a small portion of high school considering his own sexuality, eager to prove himself to Will as equally interesting and progressive, but immediately threw that thought out the window when Jane smiled at him and kissed the corner of his mouth with soft lips that hovered over his for moments after their contact had been broken.

It was just that, well, he had no idea what this Luke guy looked like, and for a moment, just a brief passing moment, Mike imagined himself in his place. He saw for just a moment, himself lying on a mattress on the floor, California sunshine rolling in through an open window over him, an arm thrown haphazardly over Will's lightly dozing body, a thin sheet over their legs. The image was so detailed, but so quick to appear, Mike had no idea where it came from. It was unnerving and took all night to unseat from the forefront of his mind.

He had to deal with this like an adult, like Nancy would. He would talk to Will about it and clear it up for himself. It had nothing to do with wanting to whisper to Will on the dark, starlit porch in the middle of the cold November night. Nothing at all to do with that.

Ghostbusters had long since ended and the party had settled around the basement in the same configurations they had as children- Will lying across the couch, Mike on the floor beside him. Lucas and Max curled together half on the floor, half propped against the back of the sofa, Dustin lying in a pile of blankets in the corner of the room, snoring softly into a throw pillow. Jane was the only one who knew that the floor would bring a crick in her neck, though, and had swept herself up the stairs to sleep in Mike's old twin sized bed, complete with the Star Wars sheets and dinosaur comforter that he'd had since at least sixth grade.

Everyone had been passed out for well over an hour, or at least, that's how long it had felt to Mike, who was lying in the dark, anxiety and shame keeping his eyes wide open and fingers gently fiddling with the corner of his sleeping bag. He continued to glance over to Will above him on the couch, his face soft and so young looking. Mike felt a wave of affection towards the smaller boy. How could

anyone have been so angry to hear that Will had a boyfriend? Mike thought it over and just couldn't dredge that feeling back up, no matter how hard he tried, but he knew it was still there, somewhere, in the pit of his stomach.

So at half past two, Mike made his move. He shifted himself out of his sleeping bag and shook Will's shoulder until he awoke, smiling softly as Will gently roused himself from sleep. He nodded towards the stairs and let Will follow him up and around until they reached the kitchen.

"Hot chocolate?" Mike asked, pulling two mugs out of the cupboard as soon as their feet hit the tile. His nerves were beginning to show, but Will paid the hesitance in his voice no mind. Will knew that Mike would get to his point sooner rather than later, if for no reason other than to go back to bed.

"Sure," he replied, and rubbed his eyes one more time, trying to get used to the dim light in the kitchen.

Mike silently began making their drinks, filling one mug with milk and when the carton turned out to be empty, filled the other with water from the tap. He popped them both in the microwave for a couple of minutes and leaned back against the counter, arms crossed and eyes pointedly not looking at Will. They stood there together in the quiet tension until the timer went off, indicating that their drinks were nearly ready.

Mike pulled the tin canister of cocoa powder and sugar down from the top shelf where his mother tried to keep it high out of Holly's reach (it never worked when Mike was around- he would give his little sister anything she asked for and everyone knew it). He plopped a few spoonfuls into each cup and stirred them, lips pursed together as he considered how he wanted to phrase everything. He passed the cup with milk in it to Will and kept the one made with hot water for himself. He always wanted Will to have the best he could offer, after all.

"Thank you," he said, accepting the mug with a gentle upturn of his lips. He took a small sip and set the mug down on the counter beside him before turning his attention to his nervous friend in front of him

and gently asked, "What's going on?"

"I-" Mike paused. What was going on? He wasn't sure. "I don't know."

Will tilted his head to the side and narrowed his eyes a little bit, staring at Mike curiously.

"Is this about what I said earlier? Because I thought you said you already knew about all that?"

"That's just the thing, though!" Mike finally got out, "I did already know! And I was fine with it, I am fine with it. I am." He sounded more like he was trying to convince himself than he was talking to Will.

"Okay," Will arched an eyebrow as Mike panicked, "You're okay with it. What else is going on?"

"I just didn't expect you to say it so nonchalantly, like it was totally cool. I mean, it is totally cool, I just-"

"Mike!" Will interrupted before he could get any louder or more freaked out, "I get it. It's fine."

"I just wanted to tell you that it's fine, I guess. I know I got weird but it was just, it's nothing, I guess. I just wanted to tell you that you're still my best friend."

When Will dropped the curious look from his face and let himself smile his softest, most gentle smile, the one he always reserved for quiet, heartwarming moments, all of the anxiety and nerves washed out of Mike's system. He couldn't believe he was so nervous to talk to his best friend. After everything that they had faced together, why would Will's boyfriend be the thing that drove them away from each other?

"You're my best friend, too, Mike," Will said.

Mike stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Will's waist, leaning down to bury his face against Will's hair. The action surprised Will, but reciprocating came as easily as breathing,

reaching up to hug Mike around his shoulders and letting his head fall against the place where Mike's shoulders met his neck. It was a familiar gesture that the boys hadn't realized how much they both had missed.

By the time Mike finally let Will go, their hot chocolate was cold, but neither of them paid much mind to that as Mike looked Will in the eyes and asked him, "So, tell me all about this Luke guy, I wanna hear all about him."

As Will's thousand-watt smile took over his face and he began to talk about his boyfriend of eight months and roommate of five, Mike couldn't help but notice the feeling in his stomach get a little bit bigger and a little bit deeper. He plastered his grin on, though, and listened to Will gush because he was a loving and supportive best friend, and if he had to work through this awful feeling in his gut by himself to protect Will, he would. He would do anything for Will.

The next morning left them exhausted but happy. Mike and Will hadn't gone back to the basement to sleep until nearly six in the morning, when dawn had already begun to break and let the orange of the sunrise creep into the half-windows of the basement. No one woke up until eleven, but the barely five hours of sleeping in the cold room, mostly on the floor, did not do well for the boys when Jane dragged herself downstairs to wake everyone up with her demands for breakfast.

Dustin and Lucas forced themselves awake, Lucas keeping hold of Max's hand that had drifted over into his in the night to pull her up the stairs behind them. Mike and Will exchange amused looks and followed them up to prepare some food. By the time the group made it to the kitchen, most of the Wheelers had cleared out of the house, save for the eleven year old Holly, who hovered around the corner watching the party laugh and toss fruit into each others mouths, missing more often than not. Mike pulled out a mug and filled it with hot chocolate, passing it to his sister with a wink, who smiled and pulled his shoulder down so she could kiss his cheek before running off to the living room for morning cartoons.

After everyone was sufficiently full, the first moves to leave began being made when Dustin stood up, stretching his arms far above his head, letting his shirt ride up a little.

“Alright,” he said, with a pat to his now-full stomach, “My mom is probably wondering where I am, as if I don’t visit her every other weekend.”

A chorus of similar sentiments were echoed by everyone else, having their own families and holiday plans to get off to, no matter how much everyone wished they could stay in Mike’s basement, laughing and eating together just like old times.

They cleared up the kitchen, packed up their duffel bags, waved goodbye to Holly, and began filtering out of the Wheeler’s house on their way to their next Thanksgiving-time destinations. On the way out, though, Mike stopped Will before he left with Jane back to the Byers-Hopper residence.

Everyone had already exchanged hugs and phone numbers and addresses for future contact, but Mike felt the need to reiterate to Will that he wanted to stay in touch this go around.

“I mean it,” he had said, hugging Will again for the thousandth time that visit, “I don’t want to lose you again.”

“You didn’t lose me, Mike,” Will had laughed.

“It felt like I did,” Mike replied, and that was that.

Author's Note:

feel free to comment & also to follow me on tumblr (@finnskaxa) for more st content, and the next chapter should be up within the week

thanks for reading, guys